IT ISN'T HARD TO TELL THAT EASTER IS OVER AND GONE. THE LILIES HAVE BEEN TAKEN AWAY, THE CROWD THAT PACKED IN HERE LAST WEEK AT THIS TIME IS CONSPICUOUS IN ITS ABSENCE, THE WORDS "HE IS RISEN AND HE LIVES" HAVE BEEN SHELVED FOR ANOTHER YEAR AND UNFORTUNATELY THINGS ARE BACK TO NORMAL. IN A WAY THIS SUNDAY IS UNIQUE AMONG ALL THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR, IT OFFERS US A SPLENDID OPPORTUNITY OF COMPARING WHAT COULD BE WITH WHAT IS: THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE JOY AND EXUBERATION OF EASTER AND THE SUNDAY AFTER SHOULD MAKE US STOP AND THINK.

THE 20TH CHAPT. OF JOHN, THE SCRIPTURE READING FOR THIS MORNING, PRESENTS US WITH AN EXCELLENT PICTURE OF OUR NEEDS AS A CHURCH AND AS INDIVIDUALS. THE DISCIPLES WERE HUDDLED TOGETHER, IN DISMAY AND FEAR. THEY HAD FAILED THEIR LORD AND IT APPEARED THAT HE HAD FAILED THEM. TOGETHER THEY WAITED FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN, PERHAPS A SQUADRON OF ROMAN SOLDIERS WOULD BURST INTO THEIR PRESENCE, ARREST THEM AND DRAG THEM AWAY TO THE SAME FATE AS THEIR LORD; OR PERHAPS THEY WOULD WAIT IN VAIN, MAYBE NOTHING WOUL HAPPEN, MAYBE AFTER A WHILE THEY WOULD JUST GO BACK TO THEIR OLD WAY OF LIVING, FORGETTING THE JOY AND LOVE, THE NEW VISTA OPENED UP TO THEM BY JESUS. WE CAN BE SURE THAT EACH ONE OF THEM HARBORED THE HOPE IN THE BACK OF HIS MIND THAT THE RUMOR THEY HEARD WAS TRUE, THAT JESUS WAS RISEN. ALONE IN THAT ROOM, THE DEPRESSED LITTLE GROUP IS A GOOD SYMBOL OF HUMANITY. MEN WHO BY THEMSELVES AND TOGETHER HAVE FAILED, MEN WHO NEVER SEEM TO

BRING ABOUT THE WONDROUS THINGS THAT THEY REALIZE COULD BE THEIRS: MEN WHO HAVE WITHIN THEM THE GIFTS TO CREATE A SAFE, COMFORTABLE AND PEACEFUL WORLD BUT WHO HAVE ONLY NUCLEAR WEAPONS, COLD WARS, POVERTY, SEGREGATION AND SLUMS TO SHOW FOR THEMSELVES. THESE ARE MEN WHO HAVE FAILED.

IN THAT ROOM THINKING ABOUT THEIR LACK OF COURAGE, WE FIND OURSELVES. AS A CHURCH, WE, THE DYER UNION PROTESTANT CHURCH WOULD BE AT HOME, SITTING AND WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN.

IT WAS TO THAT GROUP OF DEJECTED MEN THAT JESUS CHRIST APPEARED. WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO CATIGATE HIS SPINELESS FOLLOWERS: THEY HAD BEEN BY HIS SIDE AS CROWDS OF PEOPLE PRESSED AROUND THEM, PUSHING TO TOUCH THEIR GARMENTS: THEY WERE PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH HIM WHEN HE HEALED THE SICK AND SPOKE TO THOUSANDS ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. BUT WHEN HE WAS ARRESTED THEY HAD FLED, WHEN THE CROWD CRIED CRUCIFY HIM THEY TREMBLED IN SILENCE, AND NOW, THEY WERE COWERING BEHIND LOCKED DOORS, BORED AND DEJECTED WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN. JESUS COULD HAVE LOOKED THEM IN THE FACE AND WITH A WORD BROUGHT THEM TO SHAME. BUT INSTEAD HIS WORDS WERE "PEACE BE WITH YOU!" IN THESE WORDS OUR LORD SHOWED THAT ALL HAD BEEN FORGIVEN, THAT THEIR FAILURE DID NOT LESSEN HIS FAITH IN THEM.

OUR LORD'S WORDS ON THAT OCCASION CAN BE THE SOURCE OF ENDLESS JOY AND COMFORT FOR EACH ONE OF US, FOR NO MATTER HOW WE HAVE FAILED WE ARE FORGIVEN: NO MATTER HOW MANY

TIMES WE HAVE NEGLECTED TO ACT AS WE KNOW HE WOULD HAVE US ACT WE KNOW HE WILL GIVE US ANOTHER CHANCE.

WE MISS THE POINT, HOWEVER, IF WE STOP HERE. JESUS DID NOT GREET HIS DISCIPLES AND LEAVE: HE DID NOT PROVE TO THEM THAT HE WAS RISEN AND DISMISS THEM. NO, IN THE NEXT BREATH HE ISSUED TO THEM AN ASSIG MENT AND A CHALLENGE. THOSE WHO HAD MISERABLY LET HIM DOWN WERE NOW TO TAKE OVER WHERE HE LEFT OFF, TO THEM HE SAID "AS THE FATHER HAS SEN T ME SO I SEND YOU." THEIR JOB WAS CLEAR, THEIR WORK CUT OUT FOR THEM. OUR LORD HIMSELF HAD TOLD THEM THEY WERE TO BE HIS MESSANGERS: INTO THEIR HANDS WAS COM ITTED THE TASK OF SPREADING THE NEWS TO ALL OF THE WORLD.

WE ARE TOLD FURTHER THAT HE BREATHED ON THEM AND TOLD THEM TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE ACTUAL MEANING OF HIS BREATHING ON THEM CANNOT BE CERTAIN, PERHAPS THIS WAS THE AUTHORS' MEANS OF PROVING THAT THE BEING THAT HERE ENCOUNTERED THE DISCIPLES WAS REAL AND LIVING. ONE THINGS DOES COME QUICKLY TO MIND AND THAT IS THE CREATION STORY, WHERE WE ARE TOLD GOD BREATHED THE BREATH OF LIFE INTO MAN FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE OCCASIONS ARE INDEED SIMILAR IN THE FIRST WE ARE TOLD OF GOD'S LIFE GIVING POWER, HIS INFINITE LOVE THAT CREATED EACH ONE OF US OUT OF NOTHING. IN THE SECOND WE SEE THE BREATH OF GOD AGAIN CREATING THIS TIME SOMETHING RADICALLY NEW OUT OF MEN WHO HAD GROWN STALE. THERE IS NOTHING ELSSE WE CAN SAY ABOUT THE DISCIPLES AS THEY EMERGED FROM THAT ROOM

THAN THEY WERE CREATED KNEW. IN THE PLACE OF FEAR AND COWARDICE, DOUBT AND DISGUST WE SEE ABSOLUTE DEDICATION TO PURPOSE, BRAVERY UNTO DEATH, UNDERSTANDING AND ABILITY THAT ALLOWED THEM TO BEGIN A MOVEMENT THAT WAS TO SWEEP THE WORLD.

I WOULD VENTURE TO SAY THAT THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE HERE WHO AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER HAVE NOT DOUBTED THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION. I CAN SINCERELY SAY THAT I HOPE YOU ALL HAVE DOUBTED BECAUSE DOUBT PROMPTS THINKING AND FROM THINKING COMES DEEP AND TRUE FAITH. IT IS OFTEN THOUGHT THAT THE RESURRECTION IS JUST A BIT OF MYTHOLOGY TACKED ON THE END OF A PERFECTLY GOOD STORY TO MAKE IT MORE CONVINCING. BUT AS WE LOOK BACK AT THE DISCIPLES IN THEIR PATHETIC ALONENESS AND THEN REALIZE THE CHANGE THAT OVERCAME THEM WE KNOW THAT THEY COULD HAVE EXPERIENCED NO LESS THAN AN ACTUAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING CHRIST. NO ILLUSION COULD HAVE PROMPTED THEM TO THE THINGS THEY DID. NO AMOUNT OF ARGUMENT AND SELF PERSUASION COULD HAVE FILLED THEM WITH THE SPIRIT THEY DEMONSTRATED. SOMETHING HAPPENED IN THAT ROOM AND WE KNOW THAT IT WAS AN ENCOUNTER WITH A LORD WHO WAS DEAD BUT HAD RISEN.

ONE WEEK AFTER EASTER WE MUST PONDER THIS SITUATION, THIS RADICAL CHANGE THAT OCCURED TO THE MEN WHO WAITED IN THAT ROOM. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES IF WE HAVE HEARD AND ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE OF A RISEN CHRIST. AS WE CELEBRATED HIS RESURRECTION HAVE WE ALLOWED HIM TO BREATHE ON US, TO BE PRESENT IN OUR LIVES, TO RADICALLY CHANGE THE WAY WE LIVE. THE MESSAGE OF RESURRECTION, NEWNESS OF LIFE AND VITALITY IS NOT CONFINED TO ONE

SUNDAY IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FACE IT NOT ONLY ON EASTER BUT EVERY SUNDAY AND IN EVERY DAY.

WE HAVE A GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY LAID UPON US, WE TOO ARE FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE JESUS GAVE HIS DISCIPLES. HE FORGIVES US ALL OUR SHORTCOMINGS, HE OFFERS HIS PEACE BUT HE ALSO SAYS TO US, "EVEN AS MY FATHER SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU." A CHURCHES SUCCESS CERTAINLY CANNOT BE MEASURED IN TERMS OF NUMBERS OR LARGENESS, BUT WE, AS MEMBERS OF THE DYER U. P. C. MUST FACE THE FACT THAT OUR COMMUNITY IS BY NO MEANS "OVERCHURCHED." ROUGHLY SPEAKING THERE ARE APROX. 2,000 PROTESTANTS IN DYER WHO DO NOT ATTEND A CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY. SOME OF THIS NUMBER, OF COURSE, GO OUT OF TOWN TO CHURCH, BUT THE MAJORITY DO NOT GO AT ALL. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES IF WE ARE BEING TRUE TO OUR PART OF THE BARGAIN? ARE WE FULFILLING OUR ASSIGNMENTS AS CHRIST'S MESSANGERS? ~~SURELY~~ CLAOLY WE ACCEPT THE FORGIVENESS HE OFFERS AND THE ASSURANCE THAT HE GIVES, BUT THE STORY OF THE DISCIPLES IN THE ROOM REMINDS US THAT OUR FAITH IS A TWO-WAY AFFAIR, TO BE CHRISTIAN WE MUST DO OUR PART.

THE EVANGELISTIC ASPECT OF THIS CHURCH OR ANY CHURCH CANNOT BE CARRIED OUT SOLELY BY THE MINISTER, IT MUST BE SHARED BY EVERY MEMBER AS A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY. THE BOARD OF DEACONS IS PRESENTLY CONCERNED WITH THIS PROBLEM OF EVANGELISM, OR OUTREACH, OR RECRUITMENT AND IN THE COURSE OF ONE OF OUR DISCUSSIONS IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT I PREACH

A SERMON ON THE TECHNIQUE'S AND NEED OF EVANGELISM. THIS I CANNOT DO, BECAUSE IT WOULD MEAN ISOLATING EVANGELISM AS ONE SEGMENT OF CHRISTIANITY THAT IS OPTIONAL. I CAN, HOWEVER, MENTION IT PERIODICALLY IN THE EFFORT TO POINT OUT THAT EVANGELISM IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR FAITH, PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT FROM A PERSONAL ~~ASPECT~~ standpoint. FORE HEREIN WE ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING FOR THE LORD, TO CARRY OUT HIS COMMANDS IN ACTUAL PHYSICAL ACTS. HIS COMMAND TO "GO INTO ALL THE WORLD" OR THE WORDS TO THE DISCIPLES "AS THE FATHER SENT ME SO I SEND YOU," ARE NOT SUGGESTIONS FOR OUR SPARE TIME. THEY ARE COMMANDS, A STATEMENT OF OUR PART OF THE ~~CONTRACT~~ BARGAIN AND IF WE ARE TO CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIAN WE MUST DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO FULFILL THEM.

EVANGELISM IS A MUCH ABUSED WORD: IT HAS PICKED UP CONNOTATIONS THAT CHURCH MEN AND NON CHURCHMEN HAVE FOUND TO BE DISTASTEFUL. BUT WE DON'T DO JUSTICE TO THE WORD WHEN WE CONFINE ITS DEFINITION TO THE FIGURE OF THE EVANGELIST, OR TO THE MAN ON THE STREET CORNER WHO ~~BACKS US INTO THE CORNER~~ BUTTONHOLES US WITH EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS. EVANGELISM, TO EACH CHRISTIAN, MEANS THE TRUE EFFORT TO ANNOUNCE THE NEWS OF A RISEN CHRIST IN THE BEST WAY WE CAN. IN YOUR LIVES THIS MAY MEAN MERELY INVITING A NEIGHBOR TO CHURCH OR A SINCERE EFFORT TO EXPLAIN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY IN A FREQUENT DISCUSSION OF RELIGION WITH YOUR FRIENDS. FOR ALL OF US IT MEANS LIVING IN A MANNER THAT THE WORLD

CAN SEE WE ARE THE POSSESSORS OF SOMETHING SPECIAL: THAT WE HAVE A BIT OF NEWS THAT HAS STARTLED US AND CHANGED OUR LIVES: IT CAN MEAN THE DAY TO DAY DEMONSTRATION THAT AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF OUR LIVES IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF A CHRIST THAT HAS DIED AND HAS RISEN.

AS A CHURCH, EVANGELISM CAN TAKE FORM IN AN ORGANIZED, SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM. IN TWOS OR THREES, OR ALONE WE CAN CALL ON NEWCOMERS TO THE COMMUNITY, OR PERSONS HAVING NO CHURCH AFFILIATION, NOT TO PUT THEM ON THE SPOT, NOT TO ASK EMBARRASSING AND IRRELEVANT QUESTIONS. BUT IN THE SIMPLE AND FRIENDLY ACT OF INVITING THEM TO SHARE THE MEANING OF OUR FAITH. THE SIMPLE ACT OF DEMONSTRATING THAT WE HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL TO OFFER IS THE MOST MEANINGFUL ACT OF EVANGELISM WE CAN PERFORM. AS I HAVE SAID THIS WILL NOT BE THE LAST TIME YOU'LL HEAR ABOUT EVANGELISM: I HAVE HOPES THAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE WE WILL HAVE THE SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM I REFERRED TO IN THE CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE THAT EVEANGELISM IS NOT AN OPTION-BUT A RESPONSIBILITY.

IN OUR ROLE AS MESSENGERS OF CHRIST WE ARE REMINDED OF ONE THING, THE CHURCH'S HARSHEST CRITICS ARE THOSE WHO RARELY ATTEND. THE SAME IS TRUE PHILOSOPHICALLY OR THEOLOGICALLY, THOSE WHO FIND CHRISTIANITY MOST DISTASTEFUL ARE THE ONES THAT KNOW NOTHING ABOUT IT. ONE WOULD NOT HAVE TO GO FAR TO FIND SOMEONE WHO IS CONVINCED THAT CHURCHES ARE WORTHLESS BECAUSE THEY DIFFER ON SO MANY ISSUES. PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO

CHURCH FIND IT EASY TO CONTRADICT THE PEOPLE WHO DO. IN ANY GROUP THERE IS ALWAYS ONE WHO RARELY ATTENDS CHURCH BECAUSE THE ORDER OF WORSHIP DOESN'T MEET WITH HIS APPROVAL, OR BECAUSE HE DOESN'T LIKE THIS PARTICULAR MINISTER, OR FOR SOME OTHER WHOLLY IRRELEVANT REASON. FROM WITHOUT WE ARE VERY VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM.

IN THE LAST PART OF OUR TEXT FOR THIS MORNING WE FIND THIS VERY PROBLEM IN THE STORY OF THOMAS. THOMAS WAS NOT THERE FOR SOME REASON WHEN CHRIST MADE HIS APPEARANCE TO THE DISCIPLES. AND WHEN HE RETURNED TO FIND HIS COMPANIONS IN JOYFUL SPIRITS TALKING ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THEM. / HE WAS NOT THERE. / CHRIST HAD APPEARED WHILE HE WAS ABSENT AND TRY AS HE MIGHT HE COULD NOT HELP BUT FEEL THAT HIS TEN BRETHREN WERE THE VICTIMS OF WISHFUL THINKING. HE COULD NOT BE A PART OF THEIR GLADNESS AND ANTICPATION BECAUSE HE HAD MISSED THE VITAL PRESENCE OF A RISEN CHRIST. IN THIS TOMAS SHOULD NOT BE SCORNED, FOR HE WAS JUST LIKE MANY OF US, AND MANY MORE OF THOSE WHOSE SUNDAY MORNINGS ARE SPENT IN THE NEWSPAPER.

JESUS CHRIST IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN A MONTHLY EXCURSION TO CHURCH, / WE DARE NOT ! EXPECT OUR RELIGION TO BE MEANINGFUL AND VITAL IF WE DO NOT GIVE IT THE PROMINENT PLACE IN OUR LIVES. / THIS WE MUST KEEP IN MIND AS WE ATTEMPT TO BE HIS EVANGELISTS.

WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE CHURCH, THIS CHURCH EVERY CHURCH, WAS ESTABLISHED TO CARRY ON THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST: AND THAT IT IS RIGHTLY AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD, HE IS PRESENT

IN IT, HE ENCOUNTERS US IN IT, AND HE USES IT FOR THE CARRYING OUT OF HIS WILL. AND BECAUSE OF THIS AN OCCASIONAL HOUR IN THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP IS NOT SUFFICIENT. THE DANGER IS THAT WE LIKE THOMAS WILL MISS THE CHRIST BY NOT BEING HERE.~ AS WE PONDER THE MEANING OF EVANGELISM WE DO WELL TO KEEP THIS IN MIND./ OUR CHURCH DOESN'T OFFER A PROGRAM THAT WILL KNOCK A VISITOR OFF HIS REET, WE DO NOT PROPOSE TO SUPPLY ENTERTAINMENT, OR PROMISE TO SAVE HIS SOUL ONE SUNDAY OUT OF THE YEAR WE DO,/ AS MUCH AS IS POSSIBLE,/ TRY TO PRESENT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST/ AND TO SUBMIT OURSELVES TO GOD'S HOLY WILL./ WHAT WE OFFER IS ONLY AN INVITATION TO SHARE THE JOY OF OUR FAITH, THE INVITATION TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF OUR LORD.

THE LAST POINT IN MY EASTER SERMON WAS THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN EASTER FAITH AND AGAIN I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE WITH IT. EASTER MORNING IS A WONDERFUL TIME, A TIME OF JOY AND GLADNESS BUT OUR FAITH DOES NOT STOP THERE. JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN AND LIVES Today as well AND IF WE WISH HE CAN BREATH ON US. IF WE WILL LET HIM, HE WILL ENTER OUR LIVES AND MAKE US ANEW,/ THE SPIRIT THAT FILLED THE DISCIPLES CAN BE OURS, IF WE WILL JUST LET IT.

AS WE NEAR SUMMER AND THE TIME THAT IS TRADITIONALLY THE LAX PERIOD OF THE CHURCH YEAR LET US VOW TO EXTEND THE EASTER JOY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. THE RISEN CHRIST PRESENTS US WITH A CHALLENGE TO FULFILL. LET IT BE SAID THAT WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST. HE ASKS US TO HOLD UP OUR END